DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 301 970 EA 020 560

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TITLE	Performance Standards for School Superintendents. ERIC Digest Series Number EA34.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, Eugene, Oreg.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	88
CONTRACT	OERI-R188062004
NOTE	4p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Publication Sales, ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, University of Oregon, 1787 Agate Street, Eugene, OR 97403 ($2.50 handling fee with each order).
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Administration; *Administrator Effectiveness; *Administrator Evaluation; Boards of Education; Community Satisfaction; *Cost Effectiveness; Elementary Secondary Education; *Evaluation Criteria; Quality Control; School Administration; School Community Relationship; School Districts; *Superintendents
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

This digest discusses the issue of performance standards for school superintendents. School districts are discovering that developing performance standards for administrators can be cost effective, reduce crisis management, set and maintain direction, and give the community a standard for measuring school success. Several aspects of the issue on performance standards for school superintendents are covered in question-and-answer format: (1) In which performance areas should standards be defined? (2) Should performance standards be defined before the superintendent is evaluated? (3) What is an example of one district's approach (Plymouth-Canton Community School District in Michigan)? and (4) What are some ideas for followup procedures (six activities are suggested)? Appended are eight references. (SI)

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ED301970

ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management

ERIC Digest Series
Number EA 34 • 1988

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School districts are discovering that developing performance standards for administrators can be cost effective, reduce crisis management, set and maintain direction, and give the community a standard for measuring school success. In addition, "the process of developing and attending to goals and objectives can strengthen the relationship between your school board and the superintendent," Robert Heller (1984) says.

Standards should be defined for which performance areas?

In conjunction with each administrator's personally developed assessment plan, school boards, says John Hoben (1986), should establish and prioritize specific objectives within the following management areas: administrative, instructional, financial, operational, research and development, public and community relations, and human resources.

As Norita Aplin and John Daresh (1984) state, "the role of district administrator has been accepted by the general public, and most importantly by school boards, as primarily one of business and financial manager." It is necessary, they believe, to reinforce the concept of superintendent as an "educational leader." They report on one school district's efforts to determine "ways in which the district superintendent served as an educational leader supporting the instructional priorities of the school system."

An examination of administrative decisions to see how they reflect an emphasis on academic achievement, equity, communication, and long-range planning is crucial for district success, according to Aplin and Daresh. Evaluations should also measure the extent to which central office staff practices are consistent with district values, effectively utilize human and financial resources, and reflect commitment to the school district's stated direction.

Should performance standards be defined before the superintendent is evaluated?

Not necessarily. One of the ways to decide on performance standards is to carry out an open-ended examination of the superintendent's performance. Such an approach, making use of extensive interviews and observations, can reveal the areas where the superintendent is performing effectively as well as those areas where improvement is needed. This information can then be used to define the standards against which the superintendent's performance will be judged over an agreed-upon period.

The advantage of this approach—basing the standards on what is already known about the superintendent's performance—is that it takes into account each superintendent's unique leadership style and makes sure the standard arise out of the district's real needs.

In an alternative approach, specifying the performance standards is the first step the school board takes when it designs the superintendent's evaluation process. Such an approach is especially appropriate when the board is hiring a new superintendent.

Performance standards are only one of several components of an overall assessment plan. Other sources of criteria include the district's mission statement and the superintendent's job description. Data from these and other areas, Hoben says, can be formulated into matrices showing the evaluation of key result areas, compatibility of objectives with obligations, and timelines.

What is an example of one district's approach?

The Plymouth-Canton Community School District in Michigan has established an Administrative Performance Appraisal Plan whereby, according to Hoben, the board and superintendent generate yearly objectives and specify both performance standards and areas for attention. Progress on specific objectives is then reviewed in supportive sessions before a year-end evaluation. These sessions provide the board with an opportunity to discuss with the superintendent the following questions in regard

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to each objective:

What is the status of the completion of this objective?

What types of problems are hindering accomplishment?

Is the objective realistic?

Do we need to adjust the outcome?

How can we help you achieve this objective?

Robert Heller (1984) advises that specific objectives, desired results, timelines, methods of measurement, and persons responsible for the evaluation all be outlined in writing.

School boards may soon be able to use an external evaluation agent. The American Association of School Administrators, Jerry Melton and Richard Miller (1987) report, is in the process of developing assessment centers that will provide resources to identify superintendent skills. These centers will provide participants with a complete analysis of their individual strengths and weaknesses in the areas of personal, managerial, and leadership skills. The data can then form the basis of their professional development plan.

What are some ideas for followup procedures?

Performance information should be filtered back into the school system in the form of a realistic, comprehensive, and individualized improvement plan for administrators. Melton and Miller suggest six followup activities:

- suggested readings and experiences in at least two development areas
- repeated listening to individualized cassettes of participants' goals and strategies
- development of a peer support network
- followup session to check progress and provide support
- additional followup contact at specific intervals to provide reinforcement and assess performance changes
- telephone consultations to provide constructive criticism

Performance data might also be utilized to influence administrative training programs by filling in what might be revealed as perceptible gaps in superintendents' general knowledge base. David Champagne and his colleagues (1984) recommend establishing "more uniform and specific criteria for training programs which will be built around the core of learning in the school program and its reinforcement through conceptually sound supervisory systems."

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A Product of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management
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This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract No. OERI R188062004. The ideas and opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI, ED, or the Clearinghouse.